





# *l . b a c k g r o u n d*

In June 2006, the City of Houston launched the Urban Corridor Planning process, an initiative to identify the community's vision for neighborhoods along existing and proposed transit corridors. Over the next 10 years, the Metropolitan Transit Authority (METRO) will be investing \$2 billion in transit facilities, including five fixed guide way corridors within the urban core. It is in the City's interest to ensure that anticipated future development in these corridors is compatible with the transit and optimizes mobility, livability, and economic success for citizens and businesses. The Urban Corridors process will create a planning framework that accomplishes this objective.

## **The Context**

Houston is a rapidly growing city. The eight-county region is projected to experience a population increase in the next 30 years of more than 3.5 million people, of which 2 million will be in Harris County. This would be equivalent of adding a second Houston to Harris County in the next 30 years. This growth accounts for an additional 835,000 households and more than 1 million new jobs. Total population will reach 8,835,000 in the region; with 5,840,000 in Harris County alone.

Urban areas along high-capacity transit corridors have the potential to absorb some of this regional growth. With so much growth, mobility could be seriously compromised if residents, business customers and employees, and visitors choose to drive for almost every trip. The challenge is to shape the growth patterns so that alternative modes such as transit, walking and bicycling become safe, convenient and attractive transportation options while improving the quality of life for current and future residents.

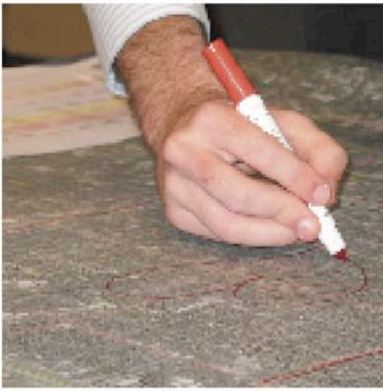
## **The Opportunity**

Across America, cities are grappling with growth, change, livability and economic resilience.

- Demographics are shifting in metro areas - only 22% of households are married couples with children; the population is aging; and single households are becoming a much larger share of the population.
- Median transportation costs now exceed housing costs for families in a growing number of cities—including Houston. The length and unpredictability of commute times is leading to broad based interest in transportation alternatives, and demand for more transit, cycling and walking options.
- Jobs now follow employees rather than employees following jobs. People want choices – in housing, transportation, work and play.

As a result, consumer preferences for lifestyle, home location, and transportation are changing. Market demand is increasing for compact, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods that have an enhanced sense of community as compared to suburbs. These concepts have been particularly successful when organized around transit stations. Surveys have indicated that over 30% of the population is interested in more compact, walkable housing near transit. Property values in such places routinely realize a 15-20% premium; the environment benefits from lower emissions and less consumption of undeveloped land – maximizing usage of public infrastructure investment.





To be competitive nationally, Houston increasingly faces a need to offer more choices for community and the highest possible quality of life. METRO's ambitious investment in Houston's established neighborhoods presents an immediate opportunity to provide these choices while addressing some of the challenges such as - vast amount of undeveloped land, decline and disrepair; protecting the treasures that make the city unique, and creating more mobility options.

